DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 965 UD 030 769

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TITLE Resolving the Conflict Maze in Secondary School.
PUB DATE Oct 95
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Urban Issues (2nd, Buffalo, NY, October 28-31, 1995).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Involvement; Conflict; *Conflict Resolution; Cooperative Learning; Crisis Intervention; Curriculum Development; Discipline; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Peace; *Prevention; Program Development; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Curriculum; Self Esteem; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS *Mark Twain School MD

ABSTRACT

The rush to establish conflict resolution strategies in the schools has created a maze of programs based on a number of models. By themselves, these programs are not sufficient to promote peace among youth, since they do not transcend the interpersonal level to consider the involvement of groups of students, the community, and families. Resolving the conflict resolution maze at the secondary school level can be achieved by developing peace and prevention plans based on the best practice program models available. Evidence is beginning to emerge that cooperative learning experiences are effective in conflict resolution curricula. Review of effective programs points out the importance of multidisciplinary approaches and the necessity of considering peer relationships in conflict resolution. One of the most effective strategies in helping students develop internal discipline and in ensuring a safe school environment is that of crisis intervention. The Mark Twain School (Montgomery County, Maryland), a middle and senior high school for students with social, emotional, learning, and behavioral difficulties, provides an example of conflict resolution approaches and crisis intervention that is effective. Each secondary school must develop a peace and prevention plan to resolve the conflicts and violence in the schools using models that are most appropriate for the particular school. (Contains 33 references.) (SLD)

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RESOLVING THE CONFLICT MAZE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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UD030769

Presented at the Second National Conference on Urban Issues. "Re-imaging the Urban Environment: Strengthening Collaborative Relationships in the Inner Cities." Hosted by The State University of New York College at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York. October 28-31, 1995.

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Introduction

Not so long ago, crisis intervention was an area reserved for persons who worked on psychiatric wards with the "mentally ill." No longer. As a result of today's more violent society, crisis intervention has been transformed to violence prevention and conflict resolution. The ability to manage aggressive and potentially violent behavior with children and youth has become a much needed skill for many teachers, counselors and support staff in secondary schools. The nation's schools are more violent than ever.

The rush to establish conflict resolution strategies has created a maze of programs. At least 5,000 U.S. elementary and secondary schools now use one of several conflict resolution models, including peer mediation, comprehensive whole-school programs, and curricular approaches (violence prevention and law-related) designed for at-risk adolescents (Shepherd, 1994). However these programs are not sufficient by themselves to promote peace among youth, since they do not transcend the interpersonal level of conflicts to consider the involvement of groups of students, the school system, families, and communities in both the causes of violence and the promotion of peace as an alternative (Cueto, 1993).

Resolving the conflict resolution maze at the secondary school level can be achieved by developing "peace and prevention plans."

Schools can develop these plans by perusing best practice programs which phase conflict resolution and positive peer relationships into the curriculum, and community-school programs.

Into the curriculum

Evidence is beginning to emerge that cooperative learning experiences are effective and for the design of conflict resolution curriculums. High school students were studied to compare the effects of two forms of instruction on science achievement and anxiety toward science. The results indicated significant reduction in anxiety of students instructed by cooperative controversy, though no differences were found on achievement (Pedersen, 1992).

The effects of educational interventions of conflict resolution and cooperative learning on vocational readiness was studied at three inner-city alternative public high schools in New York City. The results provide general positive support affecting the vocational readiness of African American and Hispanic students (Tepavac, 1991).

There is some contention that discipline is a subject that should be taught and advocates establishment of an on-going curriculum in self-control, social participation, and human development (Charney, 1993). Ideally, a violence prevention curriculum should teach social skills, feature peer-mentoring and conflict resolution programs, after school activities, and parenting, leadership, and prevention programs (Prothrow-Stith, 1994).

Many schools must stop reinforcing the self-caricatures of children in poverty as hapless, victimized, inarticulate, and

threatening beings. They should, however, view problems of school violence as not intrusive on the school program but an integral part of the school program (Haberman and Dill, 1995).

Peer-to-peer

The most popular and ever evolving arena in the conflict resolution maze is the relationship of adolescents to each other. Conflict resolution and peer mediation offer feasible opportunities for an entire school community to create a safer and more harmonious environment (Stomfay, 1994). At the same time, shifting the focus from crisis intervention to prevention and integrating dispute resolution skills into the school environment could be achieved (Cutrona and Guerin, 1994).

Some research on conflict management indicates that adolescents disagreements with close peers, in contrast to disagreements with parents or others, were managed in a manner that avoided disruption of the relationships (Laursen, 1993). More curriculums on violence prevention are being directed to middle grade students (Miller, 1993; Post, 1991). Peer mediation has been used successfully in training schools, for students with learning disabilities, to help students develop communication skills, and the prevention of trauma in the classroom. (Morse and Andrea, 1994; Hudson, 1993; Black, 1994, Gill and Frierson, 1995).

In response to adolescent girls' concerns about teen violence, rumors, grooming, careers, equity, and HIV prevention. The Delta Program provides positive learning experiences, teaches social skills and conflict management techniques, empowers girls through mentoring and leadership training, and fosters multiethnic bonding

(Hood, 1994). Prevention of HIV may be prevented in African American women if programs emphasize training in sexual negotiation, conflict resolution, and refusal skills (Wingood, 1993).

Family and community

Research on family problem solving for at-risk boys and mother-adolescent conflict situations may yield some predictability. The role of a range of affects in family interaction during family problem solving was of value with 200 at-risk boys and their parents (Capaldi, 1994). Seventy-three adolescents and their mothers completed measures of conflict and decision making related to everyday household routines, adolescent deviant behavior, and adolescent behavior toward others. Results indicated that joint decision making may play an important role in promoting adolescent autonomy and limiting problematic behavior (Kuperminc, 1993).

The impact of how adolescents relate to their communities is not to be underestimated in the conflict resolution matrix. Middle grade adolescents have engaged in community service programs which included peer tutoring, students as counsel peers, students mediating student conflicts, and partnerships between students and other groups, such as senior citizen (Connections, 1991).

"This Is My Neighborhood: No Shooting Allowed" teenage violence program operates in South Bend, Indiana. The program is designed to increase community awareness of gun violence, increase, neighborhood pride, deglamourize guns, and educate children about the criminal justice system (Jourdan, 1994). This program is but

one example that organizing at community grass roots level is necessary if conflict problems are to be adequately addressed in the schools (Randolph, 1995).

MADDADS (Men Against Destruction-Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder) was established in 1989 as a result of gang violence and the illegal drug trade in Omaha, Nebraska. The group has expanded to 42 chapters and more than 25,000 members. The men present themselves as role models making a visible presence in their respective cities against many of the negative elements which are detrimental to children and youth.

Towards a bicultural model

W. E. B. DuBois saw African Americans relating to two sets of social forces in this country -the American life and African Americans in that setting. DuBois called it a "double consciousness," and said: "One ever feels his twoness -An American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body (DuBois, 1903). Kinship and peer group socialize African American children into African American folkways. Mainstream culture is transmitted to these children by television, films and through the schools. Much of mainstream culture is in conflict with African American culture and cannot be easily integrated without some personality dislocation (Staples, 1976).

For example: Violence, gangs and classroom discipline are the most serious problems facing U.S. public schools today (Elam, Rose and Gallop,1995). Yet the models cited on classroom discipline and management is from an Eurocentric perspective (Charles, 1989). Of

the standard models usually cited most appropriate for inner city schools, none consider the cultural traits of customs and rituals, aesthetics, fashion styles, food habits or language. Non-verbal communication, such as cues given by eye contact, gestures, physical proximity or touching is given scant, if any, attention.

The Dual Self Model speaks to the bicultural functioning of children of color (Gill, 1991). The model has applications for peaceful communal associations and thus, an avoidance of personal conflict. The model is based on A. Maslow's self-actualization theory. The individual moves in two directions simultaneously: from a position of "love and belonging" (group acceptance), a child moves toward "safety" (social relationships) and "physiological" (material), and also towards "esteem" (ego satisfaction) and "self-actualization" (recognition of the spiritual).

For example: the Dual Self Model coupled with the school's peace and prevention plan could accommodate the following cultural traits in African American males. Customs and rituals (handshakes, the congregation of males on street corners, in taverns and barbershops, calling older women by their first names after saying "Miss"); aesthetics (the central role of music in the African American experience, falsetto singing as a form of masculine expression, the richness of the griot to include reggae and rappers); fashion (young African American males are the trend-setters in adolescent styles in the U.S.); food (as a way of bringing people together for interaction, not eating when others are and eating in other people's homes); roles (rearing of children by kinsfolk and extended family, sexual taboos, importance of

entertainers, athletes, hustlers and "getting over"); language (influence of music and slang terms on general society, "Black English"); communication (avoiding eye contact, touching as positive vs distrust, proximity); folklore (storytelling, folk tales and cures, the Zodiac).

The Mark Twain School approach

The Mark Twain School is a public middle and senior high school operated by the Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools. The school is for children experiencing significant social, emotional, learning and behavioral difficulties. Mark Twain's philosophy is based on the belief that emotional disabilities are not permanent and that all students have the ability to become functioning, productive students and citizens in the community. The goal for every student is to return to a general education school (Mark Twain Handbook, 1995-96,)

Mark Twain serves 250 students on the Rockville campus and an additional 200 students in its satellite programs located in various middle and high schools throughout Montgomery County. The students have a variety of social, cultural and academic backgrounds, with emotional/behavioral characteristics ranging from extremely disruptive and uncooperative to withdrawn and unmotivated. The present racial population exist of European Americans, 51%, African Americans, 40%, Latino, 8%, and Asian Americans, 1%. Seventy percent of the students have been adjudicated, thirty-five percent have been retained in at least one grade, and fifty-two percent receive free or reduced lunch.

The school has developed a highly structured, carefully

monitored behavioral management program. All students' interactions, both positive and negative, are recorded on a class-by-class basis (Pupil Observation Score). Successful days result in moving to higher levels which reinforces achievement by increasing privileges.

One of the most effective strategies in helping students develop internal discipline and to ensure a safe school environment is that of crisis intervention. When a student begins to evidence behaviors which have a potential of becoming dangerous to themselves or others, staff will intervene to ensure an environment conducive to learning. Students are then moved through the stages of "abusive," "defiant," "non-compliant," "compliant," become arriving at conflict- resolution closure.

In addition to the behavioral management system, social and emotional goals are taught in daily teacher-counselor (T/C) class meetings. Specific instruction enables students to learn problem-solving, decision-making and social skills. The T/C class meetings help students build positive self-concepts, taking more responsibility for themselves and for others, communicating effectively and developing learning strategies.

During the 1994-95 school year, 80% of students identified to mainstream by pursuing at least two classes in a general school were successful. Staff in-services are held weekly and are also attended by the principal. Outside consultants conduct training workshops throughout the year at the school.

<u>The classroom as a gang</u>

The nation's fascination with gangs has distracted educators

from the need to develop effective, coordinated strategies for preventing and combating crime (Clay and Aquila, 1994). A gang is a group. Their association with a "territory" or "turf," sharing common identity, goals, clothing, symbols, and secret codes are not unlike the Masons (or Shriners for European-Americans), fraternities and sororities, school and civic clubs, or the police for that matter. In the process teachers, administrators and school board members have perceived a negative fear of these groups that is more imagined than real. How then can teachers use the positive aspects of gang behavior for leadership in the classroom and the school?

One tactic is to treat the classroom as a gang (Gill, 1995). Yes, a gang but a positive one. But who are the leaders of a gang and how are they identified? In males they are: the best academic student, whatever "best" for a particular class may be; the most athletic; the most leadership, in terms of socialization skills; and the most outgoing personality, even if disruptive, anti-social or delinquent. In females: the best academic student; the best communication skills, to include discussion, argument and debate; and the most mature, even if forward, brazen or hellish.

Another "constructive-type" gang is based on academic-vocational-technical classes and has implications for self-help and community service (Gill, 1992). Ten-twelve middle school males would be under the tutorage of a teacher-foreman. Applying classroom knowledge in the areas of electronics, carpentry, plumbing, masonry, mechanics, health-consumer affairs, culinary/food services, business and art, the gang would provide

contractual services for their respective neighborhoods.

Classrooms like gangs have leaders. After a gang worker/counselor/teacher has the support of the gang leaders, the remaining members of the group will follow adult direction and agree to supervision. A manageable gang size is 10-12 individuals. Therefore a class of 30 students, say 20 males and 10 females, may be divided and taught as three gangs. Then these gangs can work toward a common goal of group success, individual academic achievement, training, socialization, and survival skills for the "real world."

The extent to which teachers can help students feel the "we" in situations of conflict is tantamount to their peaceful resolution. With students of color, it gives the group a sense of solidarity, a continuity, a peoplehood that easily transforms into positive self-concept and worth (Arthur, 1992).

Conclusions

Unfortunately the conflict resolution thrust has oft-times overlooked voices who could be key in preventing interpersonal violence, trauma and volatile encounters in school. From within the school they include students classified as delinquent, truant, the learning disabled, and teenage mothers and fathers. From outside the school they include grandparents and older citizens, bartenders, barbers and parolees.

The conflicts that occur at the secondary school level can only be resolved via many interdisciplinary approaches, interventions that speak to specific audiences and community-relative programs. The plan should be based on research of best

practices with selected audiences, created from the cultural strengths and personalities of the students and teachers at the school, and considerations for viewing and treating classes as constructive gangs.

Students are entitled to an environment where learning is possible and maximum growth for each student can be achieved. Each secondary school must develop their own peace and prevention plan to resolve the maze of conflict and violence that occurs in schools. All secondary school teachers working in the so-called maze to develop their students into holistic citizens should be reminded of the African proverb: "Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle."

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